

# VSDB Advisory Commission Meeting

Department of Education  
James Monroe Building  
Secondary Conference Room, 23<sup>rd</sup> floor  
Richmond, VA

July 15, 2002

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**Members Present:** Senator Emmett Hanger, Jr., Senator W. Henry Maxwell, Delegate Mary Christian, Delegate Chris Saxman, Gordon Landes, John Pleasants, Maggie Williams

**Others Present:**

- Dr. Nancy Armstrong, Superintendent, VSDB-Staunton
- Dr. Darlene M. White, Superintendent, VSDBM-H
- Dr. Karen Trump, Director of State Operated Programs
- Rachel Bravister, Teacher
- Rob Cole, State Finance Committee
- Maureen Holloway, Advocate
- Mary Willitts, Advocate
- Al Kruswich, Department of Budget and Planning

**Interpreters:** Cat Clough, Greg Camp

**Minutes:** Approved as recorded

## **Opening Remarks:**

Senator Hanger reminded the group that there are issues on the table that could be divisive and encouraged all members to work together to resolve these issues (referring to consolidation). He felt that since our last meeting some items have taken on a life of their own and his hope is to be able to find solutions to the problems the Commission faces. He further commented that the Commission was established in part because of issues like these to help resolve just such problems. He suggested having at least 2 additional meetings to help the commission focus on solutions that all can support.

**National Agenda:** Karen Trump had previously disseminated information on the National Agenda for the Education of Children and Youths with Visual Impairment, Including Those with Multiple Disabilities. The document requested regarding the department's analysis of the impact of adopting the National Agenda for the General Assembly was also distributed prior to the meeting. Page 4 of the study summarizes the department's recommendations regarding the financial impact of adopting the National Agenda. In order to support all eight goals of the National Agenda, two areas would need to be addressed in the Commonwealth: 1 - Certification requirements would need to be adopted for orientation and mobility (O&M) instructors and 2 - Vision impaired teachers' caseloads would need to be incorporated into the same funding system as other special education teachers through revision of the SOQ funding formula. State funds would need to be appropriated to fund the state share of the maximum caseload limits for teachers of students

with visual impairments. A decision package to this effect was submitted for consideration in the biennium budget but was not approved. It will be resubmitted with the next budget cycle. Discussion followed regarding making a recommendation for adoption of the National Agenda by the Department of Education. It is not clear at this time who that recommendation should go to. Dr. Trump will discuss with Doug Cox and share that information with Senator Hanger. Please note that the two schools have adopted the National Agenda and are listed with the list of Endorsers of the National Agenda. Additional discussion focused on how the Commission should connect with the Board of Education to make their recommendations regarding the two schools. The motion was made to have the Commission be on the Board of Education's agenda at least twice a year for such purpose. The motion was seconded and carried unanimously.

### **Standards of Quality:**

The Board of Education has requested input from the Commission regarding the revision of the Standards of Quality. A copy of the Standards was sent to each Commission member. Dr. Trump explained that the Standards of Quality are state code, passed by legislation and set up 7 categories of responsibility for school divisions and provisions for educational services. The Standards of Accreditation are Board regulations to clarify those 7 areas. And the Standards of Learning are the accountability system for instruction. An issue relative to the two schools is that the VSDB's do not have statutory authority to issue diplomas. John Pleasants made the motion that was seconded and carried unanimously to recommend to the Board of Education a revision to the Standards of Quality to give statutory authority to the VSDB's to issue diplomas. Senator Maxwell suggested that the Commission might need a sub-committee to review the Standards and meet with the appropriate department committee for input. A motion was made, seconded and passed unanimously for a subcommittee to meet with a representative of the Board of Education with input to any other possible revisions of Standards of Quality. Volunteers for the sub-committee included Mary Christian, Chris Saxman, Gordon Landes, Nancy Armstrong, Darlene White, and Karen Trump.

### **Update from the Superintendents**

**Dr. Darlene White, Superintendent  
VSDBM-Hampton**

**Dr. Nancy Armstrong, Superintendent  
VSDB-Staunton**

Policies and procedures are currently being reviewed and revised at both schools particularly pertaining to the regulations required for submission of the special education annual plan. Over the next two years, this will be a project that will completely revise all policies that are appropriate to the two schools. The Special Education Regulations are being integrated with the Interdepartmental Regulations Governing Children's Residential Facilities.

Both schools have gone through training for Medicaid reimbursement. In the past, the Medicaid billing was handled by a contract service at Hampton. The VSDB-S did not

conduct Medicaid billing. It is anticipated that about \$80,000 for Medicaid services will be realized at the Hampton Campus and the Staunton Campus anticipates reimbursement of approximately \$14,000.00. Both schools started billing with nursing services and will move on to increasing to the other billing options, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Psychological Evaluations, etc.

The VSDBM-H is developing guidelines for the maintenance of student records and planning staff training in meeting these requirements. Currently both Hampton and Staunton have been reviewing Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and looking at the quality of documentation with regard to adoption of the new IEP forms. Both schools have undergone extensive internal audits and restructuring of the business offices. Internal audits are conducted by the Department of Education staff.

Due to consolidation language in the Appropriation Act, the maintenance reserve funds were deleted from Hampton's budget. Dr. White will have to transfer funds from other accounts if a requested budget amendment is not passed. The Staunton campus maintenance reserve monies are currently allocated to work on the Chapel and sprinkler systems for the dormitories.

Dr. Armstrong discussed the current "Management Plan" for lead based paint abatement developed by the Industrial Training Company. This campus wide assessment of areas needing immediate attention will cost an estimated \$330,000.00. The school does not currently have these funds. Approximately \$90,000.00 was secured from the Department of Planning and Budget to replace windows in Swanson Hall. This cost is outside of the monies needed for the Management Plan.

### ***Discussion***

Gordon Landes expressed his concern that mainstreamed students with sensory impairments are not receiving a free, appropriate education. Senator Hanger suggested that the Commission may want to review whatever information is available from the Department of Education about these students to determine if they wanted to support a more formal study in this regard. John Pleasants commented that he is interested in knowing more about the outcomes for students integrated in public school programs verses students in residential programs. It was decided that Dr. Trump would assemble available information about students with sensory impairment receiving services in public schools for the next meeting.

In response to Maggie Williams asking Ms. Holloway for input on this topic, Maureen Holloway stated that the VSDBM-H could not provide for students who want to go to college and that public school programs have difficulty in preparing students for college due to the lack of qualified interpreters. Thus, the success of mainstreaming depends upon the school division's ability to recruit qualified staff. Disparity between school divisions is also an issue as a large school division like Virginia Beach has more financial resources with which to provide an array of needed services and opportunities for students.

Dr. Trump noted that there are deaf students in many localities who do not have the opportunity to communicate with other deaf peers due to the small number of persons in the area with sensory impairment.

In addition, returning to the Lead based paint issue, she emphasized that the management plan focuses on repairs to the school and protective measures for employees but does not address student safety issues. She reported that Dr. DeMary has requested immediate assistance from the Department of General Services with an emphasis on student safety. DGS is responsible for assisting the Department with the maintenance of the two schools.

Senator Maxwell asked Dr. Armstrong how the school was doing with asbestos and she indicated that they had a management plan that they were following. He further commented that all agencies should have been completed with those activities years ago.

Senator Hanger inquired about anticipated fall enrollment. Expected fall enrollment at Hampton is about 90 students (not counting pre-school and infant toddler), and approximately 152 at Staunton (including infant and preschool programs). The enrollment number for infant and toddlers serves at VSDBM-H is not currently available.

Dr. Trump reported on the Instructional Materials Accessibility Act of 2002 that will improve access to textbooks for k-12 students who are blind or who have other print disabilities. This legislation ensures that blind or other students with print disabilities in elementary and secondary schools receive instructional materials in an accessible medium at the same time as their non-disabled peers. A system for acquiring and distributing these materials in specialized formats, which includes Braille, synthesized speech, digital text, digital audio, and large print. The proposed act requires publishers to submit an electronic file of all textbooks in a standardized, national electronic file format that will allow materials to be converted more easily into accessible formats. There will be a central depository nationally and all state and local education agencies will be required to develop and implement a plan to utilize the files appropriately.

Senator Hanger questioned that with rapid technology updates “Was Virginia keeping up to date?” Both Dr. White and Dr. Armstrong felt both schools were very much utilizing all technology at their disposal.

### **Public Comment**

Mary Willetts expressed concern in what she sees as a trend to force certain staff at the VSDB-S out of their positions due to them being outspoken advocates for children referring to the turnover of 3 particular staff positions. When asked by Senator Maxwell as to the cause, as she sees it, Ms. Willetts expressed her belief that these people were being forced out by the administration. Dr. Armstrong responded she wasn't permitted to discuss the specific nature of personnel matters.

Ms. Rachel Bravister suggested that the evaluation system for teachers needs to be examined for improvement. Her concern was specifically with the documentation forms

rather than to the evaluation process. Ms. Bavister also expressed her concern for increased active recruitment of deaf teachers to work with deaf students.

Maureen Holloway expressed her concerns about how the No Child Left Behind Act will impact special education services with regard to the option to move from a failing school to a more successful school. She is interested in information relative to determining which school is better for a particular child and how each school will be evaluated.

### *Discussion*

Maggie Williams noted that 61 schools were failing and she wanted information about the names of those schools as recently reported in the newspaper. Dr. Trump agreed to secure that information for her. Mrs. Williams also inquired about the annual notification to local school divisions about services at the two schools. Dr. Trump indicated that it would be distributed in late August or early September. Dr. Trump also informed the Commission that Jim Heywood has been appointed as the head of Project Pass to develop local teams to assist with schools in need of improvement.

There was some discussion of the Commission targeting the issue of the shortage of interpreters for recommendations to the Board since this is such a problem statewide. There was no motion or resolution of this discussion topic.

Mary Christian asked if the responsibility of the Commission was to the Board of Education or the General Assembly. Senator Maxwell and Dr. Trump confirmed that the role of the Advisory Commission is to make recommendations to the Board of Education. This can be reviewed in state code §22.1-346.1 and is provided, in part, as follows for the reader's convenience:

“The Advisory Commission shall (i) monitor the operations of the Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind; (ii) advise the Board of Education and submit recommendations that seek to ensure the maintenance of a high quality and cost-effective program of study and a safe and nurturing residential environment at the schools; and (iii) perform any act or function which is in accord with purposes of this section.”

Senator Hanger ended the meeting by stating that last year might have been without major action on the part of this commission with regard to consolidation and other important matters but that they can make a positive difference in the coming months. He reminded the group that when working on a recommendation for consolidation, politics need to be avoided and to keep the children's education foremost in our plans.

The next meeting will be scheduled for late September at Staunton campus with a late October or early November at the Hampton campus. Diana Molnar will be polling participants for convenient dates.